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ABSTRACT

This paper considers data on community college students provided by the California Statewide Longitudinal Study (SLS) and the implications of this study for curriculum and educational planning in areas other than vocational education, with special emphasis on implications for the transfer program. First, a background is provided on the origins and history of community colleges in California; their original role in preparing students for transfer to 4-year institutions; and the shift in the colleges' emphasis from transfer to occupational programs. Next, the report examines SLS data that have relevance to the transfer program. These data indicate that the community college has maintained its collegiate-transfer function, though in a somewhat different fashion than a generation ago, with fewer students attending in a linear manner and most being more concerned with the course than the program. Then, 13 inferences drawn from the data are outlined and their implications discussed. The report concludes with general recommendations, including: (1) a realignment of the categories of vocational and transfer students to better fit students' course-taking behaviors and intentions; (2) a strengthening of academic standards and a closer articulation between community colleges and secondary schools; (3) the creation of a liberal arts career option program; (4) greater integration of support services with the instructional program; and (5) a continued commitment to the transfer function. (HB)

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Implications of the Statewide Longitudinal Study for the Academic Curriculum/Collegiate Function in California Colleges: A Review Paper

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This review paper is concerned with the implications of the Statewide Longitudinal Survey data for curriculum and educational planning in areas other than vocational education. It is limited to the credit course studies with particular emphasis on the collegiate function, the portion of the community college curriculum that typically falls under the heading of the transfer program. It is also called general education, academic studies, or, more restrictively, the liberal arts.

Background

The transfer program was designed originally to incorporate that portion of the curriculum that was centered on the higher learning. It was presumed to be that part of the college that sought to make people reflective and responsible; to relate art, music and literature to their lives; to increase their understanding of the past, present, and future of the society of which they are members; to bring them into the culture. The higher learning was centered on the liberal arts and sciences. In 1924 Koos studied the curriculum in 58 public and private junior colleges and found the liberal arts totaling three fourths of their offerings; ancient and modern languages alone accounted for one fourth of the curriculum. Although Koos' data were from colleges nationwide, Eells (1941) found similar percentages in California colleges as late as 1938. He reported that although 75 percent of the students entering junior colleges as freshmen did not continue beyond the sophomore year, only about one third of them were enrolled in occupational programs.

Thus, collegiate studies have been present in California community colleges from their inception. The original junior colleges developed to provide those studies to students who would have difficulty attending the university, particularly those who lived in areas of the state remote from university campuses. When Fresno City College was planned in 1907, the presenting reason for it was that it was nearly 200 miles from the University of California.

The junior colleges were to be institutions that would draw students from the surrounding neighborhoods, enabling them to begin their college studies close to home. This was presumed to be beneficial in that it made access to college feasible for students who would be otherwise unable to attend because of lack of funds, immaturity or familial obligations. The same rationale has been used throughout the development of community colleges, including their organizing branch campuses and outreach centers. And, indeed, access is enhanced by neighborhood locations.

A second reason for organizing community colleges in California was that throughout the century the University of California has maintained selective admissions policies. Even preceding the Master Plan which directed the University to take its entering freshmen from the upper one eighth of high school graduates, the University tended to restrict its entering enrollments to the top one half to one-third of the high school graduates. Accordingly, the community colleges of California were given impetus in a fashion unlike community colleges in states where the universities maintained relatively open admissions. The University of California benefited too: without the development of the community colleges it would not have been able to maintain its selectivity in an era of ever-increasing demand for collegiate studies.

A third reason for the widespread community college development in California may also be attributed to support from the University and from Stanford.

The community colleges were early on seen as a screen for upper division studies in universities that were striving to establish themselves as institutions dedicated to research and scholarship. The community colleges would do the sorting, shunting students into or away from the higher learning, allowing the universities to develop graduate and professional schools without dissipating their efforts on underclassmen.

The universities did not shut down their lower divisions but they remained highly selective. Because entering college freshmen in California have always had the option of entering a four year institution (if they were qualified), the community colleges developed as adjunctive institutions. If the universities had surrendered all the freshmen and sophomores to the community colleges, the transfer fuction would have become and remained the dominant function in the two-year institutions. But they did not and even though a sizable number of the students in the upper division of the University have come from the junior colleges, the percentage has dropped markedly. In 1950 Bogue reported that "Sixty percent of the students in the upper division of the University of California at Berkeley...are graduates of other institutions, largely junior colleges (p. 73)." Thirty years later, only 12 percent of the university's upper division students were still coming from the community colleges (Kissler, 1981).

The community colleges still serve an important role in transferring students through to the bacalaureate degree-granting institutions but their function has been altered. One shift is that more students who transfer have come from the occupational programs in the community colleges than from the collegiate or academic transfer programs. Many of the occupational groups for which students entered career training in the community colleges are driving toward the higher status that comes with their requiring the bacca-

laureate. Hence the so called two-year occupational curriculum may in fact be a set of lower division studies for a profession that encourages its members to receive higher degrees. Furthermore, the career programs typically maintain curricula in which the courses must be taken in sequential order. Many programs, especially those in the technologies and the health fields, have selective admissions policies. Students are forced to make an early commitment and make satisfactory progress. This pattern of schooling reinforces the serious students, leading them to enroll in further studies. The academic transfer courses in contrast, are more likely to be taken by students who have not made a commitment to a definite line of study.

A related issue is that the linear aspect of community colleges, the idea that the institution assists students in bridging the freshman and sophomore years, has been severely reduced as a proportion of the community college's total effort. Most of the expansion in the community colleges in recent decades has been in the areas of career and continuing education. And remedial or compensatory studies have increased notably as the community colleges have expanded their efforts to teach literacy to students who were not well prepared in the lower schools.

These shifts in proportions of students have had an effect on the transfer programs. Not only has the proportion of students in them dropped, but their curriculum has also been affected. Course prerequisites are not enforced in more than one in ten classes; not more than one in ten is a sophomore level course. The catalogs still display recommended courses semester by semester for students planning to major in one or another field but pattern of student attendance is more lateral than linear. Students take the courses that fit a preferred time of day or seem potentially useful. And within the classes the standards and requirements have shifted to reflect the students' lesser

abilities.

The collegiate courses traditionally have depended on students who were able to read and write effectively. Forms of the higher learning outside those modes of information reception and generation have not developed. A generation of experience with electronic media have not yet yielded a pedagogy or a theory of learning that tends toward the transmittal of collegiate level studies except through the medium of literacy. Although the community colleges have expanded their transfer offerings to include numerous specialized areas of study, the pedagogy has changed slower than the subject matter. The poorly prepared students have taken their toll on the collegiate courses.

The collegiate function has also come under attack by students interested in courses of immediate relevance and by those educators who feel that the highest order of service that their institutions can provide is to offer students classes that lead to immediate employment. By definition, most of the transfer courses lead especially to additional courses at a senior institution, hence do not fit that category. The connections between the transfer courses and the academic disciplines have also been weakened. Eventually the collegiate function could take on a character of its own outside the transfer courses but the community colleges are far from developing a distinctive effort in that direction.

WHAT INFERENCES REGARDING THE COLLEGIATE FUNCTION ARE REVEALED IN THE SLS?

SLS Data

The Statewide Longitudinal Study has presented one of the most important data sets ever collected on California community college students. By going directly to the students and asking for information about their college going behavior, the study directors have presented the student population in an entirely different light. They used students' actual course taking patterns as the unit of analysis rather than using the less informative, "declared major."

By classifying students into "academic" or "occupational" categories on the basis of actual course taking behavior, they demonstrated that the declared major (a category often decided by the students on the basis of insufficient information or on the spur of the moment) may not be sufficiently valid for purposes of academic planning. They showed also that the SAM model which places students into occupational categories on the basis of their taking any vocational course is biased in the direction of classifying students as having occupational intent.

The SLS has shown how community colleges can link up in data retrieval. It has led the way in demonstrating purposeful use of community college institutional research offices. The study should be repeated periodically. In this fashion the construction and use of data sets based on students' true intentions and progress would be generated in each district.

Several portions of the data set have implications for the transfer programs. In general, the most prominent of these are as follows:

One fourth the nonvocational students present vocational reasons for attending;

One fifth the matriculants drop out of all their courses before the end of the term;

Less than half the 15 to 19 year olds, that is, the recent high school graduates, plan on staying in the community college for two years -- even among those who have "transfer" as their goal, one third plan less than a two year tenure;

Less than two percent of the students are displaced homemakers, non-traditional majors, or limited English speakers;

Few of the factors contributing to student dropout are within college control;

The community college is still the point of first entry to higher

education for a significant proportion of its students--46 percent come directly from high school with no break in attendance and an additional 15 percent indicate high school as their last institution attended;

The modal community college student is aged 18;

Of the total student body, 10 percent are full time "serious" transfer students, however, a total of 36 percent say they intend transferring;

Differences among ethnic groups seem not pronounced except that the Black and Hispanic students tend more to be in the "undisciplined transfer" category;

Sex differences seem not prominent in accounting for different curriculum and attendance patterns:

Student intentions seem more powerful than program placement in determining students' attendance patterns--25 percent of the "vocational" students planned on transfer and 28 percent of the "transfer" students wanted job related skills;

A sizable proportion of the students seem to make satisfactory progress toward their transfer goals even though it takes them more than two years to graduate.

These data confirm what many students of the community college have understood for several years: in addition to its role as a career, community, and compensatory education center, the community college has maintained its function as an institution in which people intending to obtain baccalaureate degrees matriculate. However it serves that function in a fashion differently from the way it did a generation or two ago. Few students attend in linear fashion, enrolling in the first, then the second, then the third course in sequence. Few complete in two years. To most students the course is more important than the program; in fact, the programs seem institutional artifacts

with little relevance to student intentions. Students use the college for their own purposes, paying little attention to the college-determined requisites. Most indicate that they are satisfied with the latitude afforded them in reaching their goals.

Inferences

Several inferences, interpretations, and generalizations can be drawn from the data. These can be listed as follows.

Finding: Many students intend using the community college on their own terms--they drop in and out, finding that intermittent attendance suits their purposes.

Implication: The course, more than the program, is the proper unit of analysis for curriculum.

Finding: One third of the students indicate "transfer preparation" as their intent. The community college is the point of first entry for a sizable proportion of students who begin college in California--46 percent of its first time students come directly from high school.

Implications: 1) The transfer function must be maintained lest these students be done a disservice.

2) Citizens advisory committees to the transfer function should be formed in each district as a way of bolstering lay support for that function.

Finding: Much of the dropout that takes place is for reasons beyond college control.

Implications: 1) For that portion of dropout that is within college control, more accurate information should be provided to the students. When students say they dislike class content, are underprepared for class, or find the assignments too heavy, they are suggesting that more

accurate descriptions are warranted.

2) the colleges' expectations for students should be communicated to the secondary schools.

3) The courses should be bolstered with course outlines that include specific objectives. These should be available to the students prior to course entry and at the first class meeting.

Finding: There is little difference among ethnic students except that they may tend more to drop out.

Implication: A purge of the undisciplined transfer students would fall heaviest on the Blacks. Any institution that would begin dismissing students who are not making satisfactory progress toward completing a program must simultaneously develop a full cadre of support services.

Finding: At least half the students said they were helped toward their goals and half said credit was not a reason for attending the institution. As the report put it, "A person desiring to learn a skill, but not interested in credit must masquerade as a regular student (II, p.23)."

Implication: Students' intentions and realizations should be built in as a measure of college value that can be used apart from or in addition to the measure of the numbers or percentages completing courses and programs.

Finding: The differences that appeared between vocational and nonvocational students were confounded by the fact that student intentions cross categories.

Implication: Vocational and nonvocational distinctions are not very useful. They could be replaced by three categories: Degree-bound; Certificate-bound; Personal interest.

Finding: Less than two percent of the student are displaced homemakers, nontraditional majors, or limited English speakers.

Implication: The colleges should publicize what they really do: prepare people for the workplace; prepare people for transfer; provide continuing education for students desirous of enhancing specific skills.

Finding: Twenty five percent of the "vocational" students plan transfer and 28 percent of the "transfer" students want job related skills.

Implication: The vocational and transfer categories are confounded. Therefore a liberal arts career option plan should be installed. This would have students taking specific liberal arts courses in sequence while they are working in service industries, small businesses, and agencies for which specific job training programs are not a requisite. The students would be given the option of eventual transfer while at the same time they would be connected with the world of work.

Finding: More than two thirds of the students expect to take greater than two years to graduate; 91 percent are still making progress after two years.

Implication: Students making progress should be maintained in good standing while the process of shunting the others to adult education and community service areas should begin.

Finding: Few students know where they will transfer--as an example, 23 percent of the students who transferred went to a professional school but only one percent of those still enrolled who intended transferring indicated professional school as their first option. Furthermore the difficulty of students who transfer to the University of California has been documented, as in Kissler (1981).

Implication: The colleges must continue their efforts toward common course acceptance in the University of California and the California State College and University Systems. In addition they should develop

an Academic Graduation Information System similar to that operating in Miami-Dade Community College (Harper and Others, 1980).

Finding: Forty two percent of the students who received zero credits said they achieved their goals for coming to college "very well" or "excellently."

Implication: The college is serving a purpose beyond the awarding of credit; credit seems less important than many other goals. Since credit is academia's mode of accounting, students could be awarded credit for even a few weeks of attendance in a modularized course. The awarding of three credits or so for a semester long course seems not to fit students' course taking behavior or intentions whereas one half credit for three weeks of attendance might satisfy both the students and the accounting procedures.

Finding: Program planning assistance and "help outside class" ranked lowest of five college services evaluated by the students. "Classroom instruction" ranked higher than any service other than "General opinion of college."

Implication: A merger of integration of academic support services with classroom instruction seems warranted. Students can be helped in program planning, tutoring, and other instructional support activities if these activities are made a part of the actual class requirements. Rather than separate these support services as ancillary to the instructional program, they can be integrated into each course, especially the introductory courses. Program planning and learning assistance can be made a part of the course requirements.

Finding: Both the finding that many students do not know where they will transfer and the finding that Program planning assistance

ranked lowest of five college services evaluated suggest better student placement services are needed.

Implication: A periodic collegewide testing program should be adopted. All students still in attendance after 30 units and after 60 units can be tested as to attainment of their goals, learning achieved, and proper program placement.

Recommendations and conclusion

The specific recommendations for action are suggested in the section on findings and implications. Few changes in policy seem to be warranted but several actions can be taken to bring the California community college system into a position of better service to its matriculants.

The major general procedure seems to be one of aligning the categories of vocational and transfer students so that they better fit students' course taking behavior and intentions. The finding that one fourth the vocational education students plan on transferring suggests that at least a portion of the transfer function is being served through the courses designated as occupational. A restudy of the SAM categories and procedures, placed alongside the findings of the SLS, could be undertaken and recommendations for course accounting could be made.

The findings also suggest the importance of the statement of academic expectations that has recently been transmitted to the secondary schools by the University of California, the California State College and Universities, and the California community colleges. Since the community colleges are the point of first entry for most of the students who begin college in California, the students in secondary schools must be apprised of the importance of maintaining academic standards even though the community colleges take all comers. The policy should be to encourage a strengthening of academic standards along

with a closer articulation between community colleges and secondary schools. Whereas articulation agreements have been carefully worked out between community colleges and the receiving senior institutions, relatively little attentiona has been paid to articulating courses and programs with the local secondary schools. This need should be publicized and the staff members in each district urged to form committees to devlop these links.

The finding that regardless of their program enrollment a sizable proportion of the students want job related skills and connection with employment possibilities even while maintaining their options for transfer, points directly toward a liberal arts career option program. This program can be developed at the college level. It would require no new courses or staff members but merely a redirection of some of the efforts already expended. It would link existing courses currently offered for college credit, recruit students from high school into the program, arrange sections of the proper courses to be taken by students in concert, place the students in community agencies and businesses on a rotating basis, thus connecting them with the jobs they so desire while allowing them to study the liberal arts. Yet at the same time, it would be a full scale college transfer program centering on general education.

In a related study done with a sample of students from the Los Angeles Community College District in 1980, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges found that left to their own volition, students will not take advantage of the support services that are available to them. Less than one in five of the students who were not confident of their abilities in reading, writing, or other skills necessary to complete classes in which they were enrolled, had ever been to the learning laboratory, the tutorial center, or to similar auxiliary services. When asked why they had not, students responded

that they did not have time, they did not feel it was important, they did not know the service was available to them, or no one had suggested that they do so. This strongly suggests the importance of integrating the support services with the instructional program. As long as the learning laboratories are operated separate from instruction, they will not be used by the very students who need them most.

Districts could adopt policies that would urge instructors to work together with learning laboratory directors so that the activities of the laboratory would be seen as support for specific courses. They could also make laboratory attendance more directly related to the course work if they treated the laboratories as the science course treat their laboratory components. There seems no reason why a student of minimal literacy cannot be allowed to enroll in a history course with the proviso that he or she participate in extra class exercises designed to enhance literacy. The materials used for those students could be selected so that they reinforce the course work subject matter itself.

The students in the SLS certainly seem more concerned with the courses than with the programs; progress through the college-determined patterns of curriculum seem relatively unimportant to them. This suggests that students who are shunted to separate developmental education courses may not be receiving what they want and need. The developmental education activities should be seen as supportive to the transfer level courses. District policy should be to avoid constructing remedial and developmental programs outside the transfer program. The remedial activities can be done within each academic division and tied directly to the transfer type courses.

A recent report of the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities stated that when given a choice, minority students should pick a proximate

senior institution over a community college. Ignoring the fact that for most students who enter community college, the senior institution option is not available because of funding, geographical, or other limitations, the Commission made the assertion by way of pointing out that students who seek the baccalaureate yet who begin in community colleges jeopardize their chances of obtaining their goal. Using lines of argument based on economic analysis, a Brookings Institution report recently reached similar conclusions. The authors pointed out the false economy resulting from people seeking baccalaureate degrees who begin at the less expensive community colleges but who are less likely to receive them. They conclude that because so few people who begin in community college gain baccalaureate degrees, it might be more economical for a state to move all transfer level studies to the senior institutions.

These types of assertions must not go unchallenged. They can be countered on a concerted basis by state level spokespersons who realize that the current wave of reduction in financial aids available to college students will put even more minority students in community colleges. Along with all students, an emphasis on the collegiate function can enhance their ability to cope with their environment and assist them in keeping their options open. A Center for the Study of Community Colleges survey of students in Washington community colleges showed that the more liberal arts courses taken, the more confidence students gained in their ability to read, write, and speak effectively, and to understand their heritage and culture (Friedlander, 1982).

The community colleges in many states, most notably Florida, have installed procedures to tighten academic standards. They have done so by integrating support services with the academic courses, requiring entrance tests, strengthening and requiring introductory courses built across academic disciplines, and dropping from the rolls students who are not making progress toward

completing any program. Student information systems are a key element. These procedures can be adopted by California colleges.

The community college offers the best hope of college level studies for most of its matriculants. The transfer function must not be allowed to slip out of the community college by inadvertance or because college spokespersons think they must promote different missions. A renewed emphasis on transfer education can greatly increase the percentage of students passing through to the senior institutions. That function should be promoted by the Chancellor's office as its contribution to maintaining institutional comprehensiveness.

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